Suicide and social time

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A maioria das teorias sociológicas explicam o suicídio com condições macrossociais estáticas, como o grau de integração social ou de desigualdade, de modo que não identificam as causas dinâmicas de suicídios individuais. Para corrigir essa deficiência, utilizo a teoria do conflito de Donald Black, que explica os choques entre certo e errado como movimentos do tempo social – flutuações dinâmicas do espaço social, incluindo mudanças de nível de relacionamento de intimidade e de desigualdade. Proponho que o suicídio é causado pelo aumento da desigualdade e pela diminuição na intimidade, e a probabilidade de suicídio varia diretamente com a dimensão e a velocidade dessas mudanças.
Palavras-chave: suicídio, teoria, desvio, violência, sociologia pura

Most sociological theories explain suicide with static macro-social conditions, such as a degree of social integration or inequality. Thus these theories do not actually identify the dynamic causes of individual suicides. To correct this shortcoming I draw from Donald Black's theory of conflict, which explains clashes of right and wrong with the movement of social time – dynamic fluctuations of social space, including relationship-level changes in intimacy and inequality. I propose that suicide is caused by increases in inequality and decreases in intimacy, and the probability of suicide varies directly with the size and speed of these changes.
Keywords: suicide, theory, deviance, violence, pure sociology

Introduction

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What causes suicide? There have been few developments in the general theory of suicide since Durkheim's pioneering work, and fewer still address the actual causes that lead to particular cases of suicide. Sociologists often explain suicide with the characteristics of the entire society, such as its level of economic inequality (e.g., UNNITHAN et alii, 1994). Or they explain suicide with the characteristics of individuals, predicting that a person's risk of suicide varies with factors like wealth and education (e.g., HENRY and SHORT, 1954). But while such theories are capable of explaining variation in suicide across groups or individuals, they do not actually identify what causes people to kill themselves. Causality in the strictest sense is a dynamic relationship between events: cause and effect, stimulus and response, action and reaction[1]. Conventional theories do not identify causes because they focus on static conditions rather than dynamic events. Static conditions are properties that exist

1 Not all scientific explanations are causal in this sense, nor must a general theory be causal in this sense to explain variation. Still, causal theories increase our ability to predict and explain human behavior.

at any given moment, while dynamic event are changes in these properties. Wealth and inequality are static conditions – the state of a person or group during any particular period of time. But killing is dynamic, the conversion from living to dead. Suicide is an event, and a basic principle of causal explanation is that all events stem from previous events (BOHM, 1959, p. 1). Thus something static cannot cause something dynamic (BLACK, 2011, p. 5). Only change can beget change. For example, if social inequality is the same from month to month, how can it be the cause of suicides that occur during those months? Inequality, as such, does not cause anything. The same is true of wealth, poverty, or social isolation. A static condition can never be a cause. Yet aside from Durkheim's (1951[1897], pp. 249-252) classic discussion of how changing levels of wealth can cause suicide, there has been little general theoretical interest in how dynamic forces produce self-destructive behavior.

In contrast to conventional sociology, Donald Black (2011) explains conflict – clashes of right and wrong – with the dynamic aspects of social life, such as changing patterns of intimacy and inequality. Here I draw on Black's theory to address the sociological causes of suicide by specifying various fluctuations of social space that commonly cause suicide [2]. While each individual suicide might follow a unique constellation of events, I argue that two basic types – increases of social inequality and decreases of intimacy – lie behind most cases of suicide, and that the probability of suicide is a direct function of these changes. In doing so, I advance the theoretical sociology of suicide by amending Durkheim's theory of anomic suicide, formulating general propositions meant to explain suicide across the entire range of human societies, and demonstrating the way these propositions can be integrated with conventional theories to more accurately predict and explain suicide. But first I outline Black's theory in more detail.

Social space and social time

Black's (1976; 1998) theories of conflict management seek to explain how people express and handle grievances: Given an offense – such as a theft or assault – will the victim turn to vengeance, avoidance, adjudication, or something else? He explains this variation with the location and direction of the

2 By suicide I mean self-inflicted lethal violence, including attempted self-killing and self-killing carried out with a degree of external assistance or coercion.

conflict in a multidimensional social space including the status (vertical space), intimacy (relational space) and cultural diversity (cultural space) of all those involved (BLACK, 1995). Each conflict has its own social structure, and this structure predicts how it will be handled. For example, the probability that an aggrieved individual will file a lawsuit depends partly on the direction of the grievance in vertical space: Downward litigation (against a inferior status) is more likely than upward litigation (against a superior status) (BLACK, 1976, pp. 2-12). Also important is the location of the grievance in relational space: Conflicts between intimates (such as spouses) are less likely to result in litigation than conflicts between those who are more distant (such as strangers) (BLACK, 1976, pp. 11-36).

Suicide too is sometimes a way of handling a grievance, as when someone kills himself in response to an unfaithful lover or unjust government policy. But whereas litigation is more likely against an inferior, suicide is more likely against a superior – that is, upward suicide is greater than downward suicide (MANNING, 2012, p. 215; BAUMGARTNER, 1984). And whereas litigation is less likely when the offender is an intimate, suicide is more likely (MANNING, 2012, p. 214; forthcoming). Like litigation, suicide varies with the location and direction of the grievance in social space. The same is true of other forms of conflict management, and of human behavior more generally: Lynching, welfare, science, predation, drug testing, research, and genocide all vary with their social structure (BLACK, 1976; 2000; BORG and ARNOLD III 1997; CAMPBELL, 2009; COONEY, 2006; JACQUES and WRIGHT, 2008; MICHALSKI, 2003; SENECHAL DE LA ROCHE, 1996).

Black's theory of moral time extends his strategy of explanation beyond social space towards social time. Noting that time of every kind is the dynamic dimension of reality – observable and measurable only by such changes as the motion of a clock's hands – social time is the dynamic dimension of social space (BLACK, 2011, p. 4). And because social space is multidimensional, so is social time: *Vertical time* is a fluctuation of vertical space (as when one person gains or loses more wealth than another), *relational time* is a fluctuation of relational space (as when two people grow more or less intimate), and *cultural time* is a fluctuation of cultural space (as when someone converts to a new religion) (BLACK, 2011, p. 4).

Moreover, whereas earlier Blackian theories specify how the management of conflict reflects social structure, the theory of moral time explains why conflict erupts in the first place with the movement of social time: "The greater and faster the movement of social time, the greater is the likelihood of conflict and the greater the conflict is likely to be" (BLACK, 2011, p.6) – or, in other words, *conflict is a direct function of social time*. For example, every movement of relational time has the potential to spark conflict, be it a guest who overstays his welcome or a friend who fails to keep in touch. And the greater and faster the change in intimacy, the more likely it is to give offense – for instance, a sudden termination of a relationship is more likely to cause a conflict than a small reduction of contact. The same is true for changes in inequality or diversity: The greater and faster the fluctuation, the more likely and severe the conflict.

Like social space, social time is a ubiquitous feature of the social universe, and is relevant not just to conflict, but to all forms of human behavior. Thus the fluctuation of social space does not just explain suicide as a form of conflict management, but suicide of all kinds. The movement of social time causes all suicide. But not all movements of social time are equally likely to cause suicide: the primary causes of suicide are vertical and relational movements, and some vertical and relational movements cause much more suicide than others. The following sections specify and illustrate these movements.

Note that the primary aim in these pages is to advance propositions about the fundamental sociological causes of suicide, and to this end I cite empirical evidence to illustrate and support these propositions. The evidence comes from a comprehensive reading of all available literature on the topic of suicide, including not only statistical studies but also ethnographic and historical studies of suicide in tribal and ancient societies. Such a wide variety of sources may seem unusual to those more familiar with surveys and experiments, while historians and ethnographers may bridle at the comparison of distinct societies and cultures. But my research strategy – which Eviatar Zerubavel (2007) dubs "social pattern analysis" – is an appropriate way to develop general theories that has been used by many celebrated theorists, both classical and modern. Developing general theory requires comparing evidence from as many

contexts as possible and using abstract analogical reasoning to identify generic patterns that manifest themselves in various concrete contexts. It also requires a strong analytical focus – using a strategy of "theoretical sampling" to identify theoretically relevant data (Id., p. 140). While the studies cited below are by no means a random selection of the suicide literature, they are all data relevant to my theoretical aims. And though the preliminary research of the theorist is no substitute for the severe tests of empirical specialists, the fact that the patterns I address crop up repeatedly in dozens of studies from as many different societies supports the theory's generality and validity.

Suicide and vertical time

The vertical dimension of social space includes the distribution of wealth, respectability, and performance (BLACK, 2000, p. 49). Fluctuations of vertical space occur whenever anyone experiences any kind of vertical mobility – gaining or losing wealth, organizational rank, or any other form of social status. Such vertical mobility almost invariably alters relations of superiority and inferiority, increasing or decreasing the quantity of stratification in various social relationships. An increase in inequality is *overstratification*, which occurs when anyone falls below others (becoming a social inferior) or rises above others (becoming a social superior). Overstratification is a movement of vertical time that often causes suicide. More precisely, it causes suicide among those who fall below others, experiencing an increase in social inferiority – or *overinferiority* (BLACK, 2011, pp. 71-76). Those who lose wealth, respect, and other forms of stature are more likely to kill themselves, and the greater and faster the loss, the more likely it is to cause suicide: *Suicide is direct function of overinferiority* (BLACK, 2011, pp. 71-76).

The loss of wealth

Émile Durkheim (1951[1897]) long ago proposed that any form of vertical mobility – whether upward or downward – disrupts the "equilibrium" between an individual's desires and his or her means of satisfying them and contributes to what he called "anomic suicide." Durkheim based his theory of anomic

suicide on his finding that suicide increases with both economic expansion and economic recession. But much evidence indicates that suicide rates rise only during recessions – when downward mobility is greater (e.g., HENRY and SHORT, 1954, WASSERMAN, 1984; ARAKI and MURATA 1987; compare HINTIKKA et alii, 1999). For example, recent studies (using time-series analysis) report that the global economic crisis of 2008 was significantly associated with rising suicide rates in several dozen European and American nations, including Argentina, Chile, France, Germany, Mexico, Norway, and the US (CHANG, et alii, 2013; REEVES et alii, 2012; BARR et alii, 2012). While little evidence supports Durkheim's claim that upward mobility causes people to kill themselves, he was correct that downward mobility could be lethal.

Historically, the loss of wealth is a common cause of suicide. In 18th century England, for example, members of the aristocracy often killed themselves after suffering massive gambling losses or otherwise squandering their fortunes (MACDONALD and MURPHY, 1990, pp. 278-280). In 19th century England, unemployment and financial ruin were among the most common reasons for suicide (ANDERSON, 1987, pp. 117-119). In 18th century Geneva, technological changes led to high unemployment among watchmakers, causing them to have the highest suicide rate of any occupational group (WATT, 2001, pp. 180-182). One watchmaker killed himself with arsenic after finding his skills rendered obsolete:

> According to his employer, Jean-Pierre Rivoire, Delaine had showed considerable talent and had made a decent living when he worked in the manufacture of "the old style" of watches. With the introduction of new styles and techniques, however, Delaine found himself compelled to come work for Rivoire to learn the new methods. This was almost as if he were beginning a second apprenticeship, and Rivoire attested that Delaine was upset about the considerable loss in income that he suffered as a result of technological change (WATT, 2001, p. 182).

Notably, these were highly paid and skilled workers who experienced a high degree of downward mobility when they lost their jobs. Low-wage, unskilled textile workers would have experienced relatively less downward mobility, were less

likely to kill themselves because of unemployment (WATT, 2001, pp. 185-186). On the other hand, those at lower social elevations are sometimes more vulnerable to devastating downward movements. Small-scale farmers, for example, are more susceptible to debt and foreclosure. Thus in modern India, crop failures and mounting debts have led to a drastic increase in suicide among peasant farmers (MOHANTY, 2005; MISHRA, 2006). But even wealthier farmers are not entirely immune: One wealthy farmer "advanced more than two hundred thousand rupees" to poorer growers, and killed himself when crop failures made him lose hope of recovering his investment (MOHANTY, 2005, p. 264).

Downward mobility also causes suicide in the contemporary USA. For instance, one study in New Orleans found that male self-killers were more likely than others to experience the loss of a job, a reduction in pay, or some other form of downward mobility, and that the majority of male suicides followed losses such as these (BREED, 1963). A study of suicides in Chicago likewise found that 37% of male victims had retired or become disabled just prior to their suicide and that only about 23% were working full-time (MARIS, 1981, p. 137). In fact, unemployment at least doubles an individual's risk of suicide, and the effect is most pronounced immediately after the loss (BLAKELY et alii, 2003; KPOSOWA, 2001). In my own study of South Metro (a mid-sized city in the Southern USA), about 13% of coroner's suicide reports mentioned financial crises such as lost jobs, threats of eviction, or mounting debts[3]. For example, one middle-aged self-killer "had run out of money, was behind on rent, had no food in his apartment" and had his electricity turned off. And a young carpenter who killed himself was in "great financial distress due to the recent decline in the construction business."

Wealth includes more than money or land. Black notes that the human body is "the most fundamental means of production" and physical capacities are the most basic form of material wealth (2011, p. 76). The loss of health is often permanent and possibly devastating. Disease was the single most common cause of suicide in the rural villages of 19th century Sussex, England (ANDERSON, 1987, p. 155). In my study of South Metro, physical illness was a factor in 32% of the 260 suicides. Chronic, debi-

3 "South Metro" is the pseudonym. In my study I reviewed coroner's records of suicide cases, including statements from informants and suicide notes.

litating, and terminal illnesses are especially dangerous. For example, one foreman's severe arthritis had led to an inability to use his hands, and "he had told several family members he was 'ready to go'" shortly before killing himself. Other studies report that being diagnosed with cancer doubles the risk of suicide (MISONO et alii, 2008; ROBINSON et alii, 2001).

The association of illness with suicide is partly due to purely physical suffering, and to the extent this is so effective painkillers may reduce the probability of actual or attempted self-destruction[4]. But even with little or no physical pain, declining health is still a loss of stature that many find intolerable. As Black comments, "Sickness… not only incapacitates and kills but frequently leads to a condition of social dependency similar to a child's" (BLACK, 2011, p. 79). Disabled persons generally have higher rates of suicide, and the rate of suicide increases with the degree of disability (HOPKINS, 1971)[5]. Yet, since all persons spend their early life with little strength or agility, it appears their loss is much more severe than their lack. And because old age involves an irreversible physical decline, age is often positively correlated with suicide (WHO, 2002, p. 191)[6].

Recall that suicide is not merely a function of downward mobility, but of overinferiority – falling below others. The degree of overinferiority depends not only on the absolute magnitude of the loss, but on the relative mobility of everyone in a given social network: A downwardly mobile individual will be less likely to commit suicide if his or her associates are downwardly mobile as well. For instance, if all the men in a neighborhood or friendship clique simultaneously lost their jobs, each would be less likely to kill himself than if he were the only one to suffer such a loss. Conversely, if one member of a social network falls while others remain the same, he or she is more likely to commit suicide – because there is a greater degree of overinferiority[7]. Thus some studies (e.g., MÄKI and MARTIKAINEN, 2012; CHANG et alii, 2013) find that the impact of unemployment on suicide varies inversely with the overall unemployment rate: In times of widespread unemployment, those who lose jobs are more likely to have other associates who are downwardly mobile as well.

4 For example, among the Vacquiero pastoralists of Spain, suicide due to illness declined after the introduction of morphine (CÁTEDRA, 1992, pp.161-171). According to one informant: "[B]efore many people hanged themselves because those who had cancer had to suffer pain like fire; there wasn't any alternative. Now they give you morphine and you have no more pain" (CÁTEDRA, 1992, p.170).

6 The suicide of the recently disabled sometimes has an altruistic quality, and both self-killers and their associates may view the death as a favor to potential caretakers (cf. DURKHEIM, [1897]1951, Ch.4). For example, informants specify that elderly Eskimo commit suicide "not merely to be rid of a life that is no longer a pleasure, but also to relieve their nearest relations of the trouble they give them" (quoted in LEIGHTON and HUGHES, 1955, p.328). Sometimes such sacrifices are not only accepted by others but may be encouraged or assisted (LEIGHTON and HUGHES, 1955; PERLIN and SCHMIDT, JR., 1975, p.157).

6 Sexual attractiveness is another physical resource that declines with age. Thus one American woman, described as "brazen about her beauty," killed herself because "at 34 . . . she felt she was going downhill" (BREED, 1967, p.194).

The loss of respect

Another form of social status is normative status, or respectability: A reputation for deviant or virtuous conduct (BLACK, 1976, Ch.6). Damage to one's reputation – whether through arrest and conviction or mere accusation and gossip – is another form of downward mobility that causes suicide. Some kill themselves in ritualized acts of atonement, such when the samurai of feudal Japan disemboweled themselves due to offenses against their superiors (see, e.g., SEWARD, 1968, p. 38; MANNING, 2012, pp. 211-212). Others use their deaths to inflict punishment on their accusers (MANNING, 2012; forthcoming). For instance, amongst the Aluku of French Guiana, someone accused of sorcery might commit suicide to transform himself into a vengeful spirit (HURAULT, 1961, p. 345; LENOIR, 1973, p. 105). Still others want only to escape from the situation, fleeing from guilt and shame or escaping further sanctions (BAUMEISTER, 1990). In ancient Rome, for example, those accused of criminal wrongdoing might turn to suicide to avoid further damage to their family's reputation that could result from trial and conviction (VAN HOOF, 1990, p. 112). Whatever the details, the loss of respectability causes suicide. In tribal and peasant societies with little stored wealth, it may be the greatest form of downward mobility, and therefore cause much more suicide than purely economic losses. Amongst the Himalayan Lepcha, for example, most suicide follows a public rebuke:

> There have been six suicides in Lingthem and the neighbouring smaller villages in the last twenty years, and in every case the suicide has been immediately subsequent to a public reproof (…) Chélé's father killed himself because his wife and her family publicly blamed him for neglecting her and his work while she was ill. Kurma's uncle killed himself because he was blamed for not keeping his wife in order, and Kurma's brother because he was blamed for his uncle's suicide (GORER, 1967, p. 269).

Similarly, suicide among the Trobriand islanders of Melanesia often follows a public accusation of deviant conduct, as when one young man jumped to his death from a palm tree after being accused of incest (MALINOWSKI, 1976[1926], pp. 77-79).

7 The quantity of overinferiority can be measured by the average increase in inferiority between a given person or group and all other members of the social network. One potential application of the present theory is to assess suicide risk by asking subjects not only about their own economic situation, but that of their friends and relatives.

Respectability sometimes depends on the ability to retaliate violently against slights, insults, and other offenses, and whoever fails to retaliate suffers dishonor (BLACK, 2011, pp. 71-74; COONEY, 1998, Ch.5). English aristocrats might thus opt for suicide after failing to preserve their honor by fighting a duel (MACDONALD and MURPHY, 1990, p. 276), for example:

> In 1741 a gamester named Nourse fell into a violent argument with Lord Windsor at a fashionable London casino, and challenged the peer to a duel. Windsor refused, and Nourse, knowing that he could not have refused to fight an equal, was so enraged and humiliated by the insult that he went home and cut his throat (MACDONALD and MURPHY, 1990, p. 279).

But whether the issue is honor or not, being the target of insults, accusations, and punishments can trigger self-destruction, as can all manner of shame and humiliation. For instance, villagers in 19th century Sussex, England, might kill themselves due to "humiliation and loss of neighbourly or family esteem" (ANDERSON, 1987, p. 156). Shame and reputational damage also cause suicide in the contemporary world. In 2000, when the chief of Germany's Christian Democratic Union was suspected of embezzling the political party's funds, he hanged himself and left a note confessing his crime (PRIDMORE and MCARTHUR, 2008). And public exposure of wrongdoing might lead to suicide in the contemporary USA. Being accused of child molestation, for example, brings a drastically elevated risk of suicide, especially among suspects with no previous criminal record (HOFFER et alii, 2010).

Superiority and inferiority

Social inferiority does not always result from one's own loss – rather, it may also result from someone else's gain. When one person or group rises above another, the one who rises becomes superior to the one who does not. Greater superiority necessarily entails greater inferiority, and those who remain in place while their associates rise may react much like those who have suffered a loss. And the greater the degree of upward mobility in a given social network, the

greater the inferiority of those left behind. Falling behind is therefore most likely to cause suicide in contexts where advancement is normal, as when students are held back in school or young men cannot find employment as their friends and age-mates move into the workforce. Especially dangerous is when someone is downwardly mobile while his or her associates are upwardly mobile. For example, one young New Zealander's failures were apparently magnified by his brother's success:

> At sixteen Scott Bernard decided that he could never achieve his school certification. A friend noticed his sagging confidence on the two fronts that mattered: school and sports. "His older brother achieved really well in marks plus sport at school. Scott was sensitive to this and also felt pressured to perform in Rugby which he eventually gave away this year" (WEAVER and MUNRO, 2013, p. 776).

The reciprocal nature of superiority and inferiority is especially apparent in situations of hierarchical domination, where the rise of one party requires the subordination of another. For instance, patriarchal husbands often inflict violent discipline on their wives, and this is a major reason for female suicide (including attempted suicide) in societies such as rural China and Highland New Guinea (BERNDT, 1962; JOHNSON, 1981; WOLF, 1972; 1975; ZHANG et alii, 2004). The conquest of one society by another can subjugate millions, and sometimes produces mass suicide. During the European conquest of Cuba, for example, native Cubans hanged and poisoned themselves in huge numbers to avoid "serving such and so many ferocious tyrants" (PERÉZ JR., 2005, p. 4). Africans captured for slavery in the Americas also killed themselves in large numbers (PIERSEN, 1977; PERÉZ JR., 2005, p. 35). Sources suggest that slaves who had been social or political elites in their homeland – and consequently experienced the greatest degree of overinferiority – were particularly likely to choose death over bondage (PIERSEN, 1977, pp. 151-52). In the ancient world, battles and sieges sometimes caused mass suicides among the defeated. When Alexander the Great invaded India, for example, "in one city alone some twenty thousand males, females and children embraced flames" (THAKUR, 1963, p. 165). Political repression in mo-

dern society can also lead to widespread suicide, particularly if it involves overinferiority across multiple dimensions of status. Thus when the Nazis stripped Jews of their livelihoods, property, and virtually all other forms of social stature, the suicide rate of German Jews skyrocketed (GOESCHEL, 2009, Ch.3). And a wave of suicide swept non-Jewish Germans after Germany's defeat in 1945 (Id., Ch.5).

Suicide and relational time

The relational dimension of social space includes the distribution of social ties, such as the degree of intimacy in a relationship (BLACK, 1976, Ch.3). Sociologists since Durkheim have recognized that the nature and number of social ties explains suicide. Using different language but overlapping concepts, theorists have restated Durkheim's theory by proposing that suicide varies inversely with social integration and directly with social isolation (DURKHEIM, 1951[1897]; HALBWACHS, 1978[1930], Ch.8; GIBBS and MARTIN, 1964). And a great deal of research supports these propositions (e.g., DANIGELIS and POPE, 1979; MARIS, 1981, pp. 111-115). But suicide does not just vary with the quantity and closeness of relationships; it also varies with changes in relationships. Movements of relational time occur whenever a relationship begins or ends, expands or contracts its scope, or becomes more or less active (BLACK, 2011, Ch.2-3). Some of these fluctuations involve a reduction in the intimacy of a relationship, as when friends part ways or spouses divorce. Black refers to such reductions as "underintimacy" and identifies them as a cause of suicide. Following Black's theory, we can specify that *suicide is a direct function of underintimacy* (BLACK, 2011, pp. 43-49). This implies that the greater and faster the reduction in intimacy, the more likely it is to cause suicide.

Divorce and separation

One form of underintimacy is divorce. The end of a marriage is a drastic decline in intimacy, and is a common cause of suicide. Among the Iroquois of North America, for instance, failed marriages have been a major cause of suici-

de since colonial times. In one case, a couple "had a falling out, and he went home in the night telling her that he was leaving her for good, that he would not return. The following morning she went out and dug up the [*poisonous*] root, ate it, and died" (FENTION, 1941, p. 93). In another, a man poisoned himself after his wife threw him out of their home (FENTON, 1986, p. 450).

Research on modern nations confirms the relationship between suicide and marital breakdown. Several USA studies report a positive association between divorce rates and suicide rates, and individual-level studies of Australia, Brazil, Hong-Kong, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, and the USA all confirm that separated and divorced persons are more likely to kill themselves (BREAULT, 1986; DANIGELIS and POPE, 1979; FARIA et alii, 2006; KPOSOWA, 2000; STACK, 1990; WASSERMAN, 1984; YIP et alii, 2012). Notably, individual-level studies of suicide in Australia and Finland specify that the risk of suicide is greatest in the period immediately following separation (METSÄ-SIMOLA and MARTIKAINEN 2012; WYDER, et alii, 2009). A "sociological autopsy" of 100 individual suicide cases in England and Wales found that "slightly more than half the cases mentioned relationship problems or breakdown and a third indicated that these difficulties were the main trigger for suicide" (FINCHAM et alii 2011). Similarly, many informants and victims in my South Metro study indicated that separation was the main reason for self-destruction. For instance, one man called his recently estranged wife while she was at work:

> He asked her if she had changed her mind about the divorce and she said no. He then fired a shot into the ceiling and asked her if she heard it. She said yes. He told her she'd better get home before the children got home, and then he fired another shot.

Unmarried partners may achieve similar levels of intimacy, and their separation is also a common trigger for suicide. For example, a South Metro woman shot herself while her cohabiting boyfriend was in the process of moving out. And one young man likewise killed himself after his girlfriend told him she wanted to break up and he would need to find a new place to live.

In many cases an abandoned spouse or lover will express hostility toward their former partner, and some even use suicide and its consequences as a way of seeking vengeance. They might leave notes specifying that the estranged lover is to blame for the suicide, apparently seeking to inflict guilt or shame. Others kill themselves in front of their former partner, potentially traumatizing them (MANNING, forthcoming). Still others go further and kill their estranged partner before committing suicide – indeed, most cases of homicide-suicide are triggered by the departure of a spouse or girlfriend (see, e.g., MILROY, 1998; LIEM and NIEUWBEERTA, 2010).

Infidelity

Because a greatest degree of underintimacy occurs when a relationship is completely severed, such movements of relational time are most likely to cause suicide. But lesser degrees of underintimacy can also be dangerous. Consider infidelity. According to Black (2011, pp. 21-22), intimacy is zero-sum: Becoming closer to one person necessarily means becoming more distant from others. When one spouse has an extramarital affair, he or she becomes more distant from the other spouse (BLACK, 2011, pp. 44-45). Adultery is thus a kind of underintimacy, and it too causes suicide. For example, one observer of the Delaware Indians writes that "Many a [*husband*] takes [*his wife's*] unfaithfulness so to heart that in the height of his despair he swallows a poisonous root (…) Women, also, have been known to destroy themselves on account of a husband's unfaithfulness" (ZEISBERGER, 1910, quoted in FENTON, 1941, p. 21). Among the Tikopia of Polynesia, adultery and other instances of "domestic discord" are a major cause of suicide (FIRTH, 1967, p. 128). Adultery also causes suicide among modern Americans. For instance, "As soon as American poet Robinson Jeffers' wife learned he was having an affair with another woman (…) she lay down in a bathtub and shot herself in the heart" (BLACK, 2011, p. 46, citing KARMAN, 2001). Likewise, one Kentucky woman killed herself after discovering her girlfriend's infidelity, leaving the words "I loved you" scrawled in lipstick on a mirror (HOLMES and HOLMES, 2005, p. 16). And in a case from my South Metro study, a male self-killer left a note reading "This is my divorce from Debbie. Cheating bitch."

Death

Relationships sometimes end because one party intentionally leaves, as is usually the case in divorce. In other cases, however, relationships end because of forces beyond either party's control, such as death due to accident or illness. Suicide might follow the death of a spouse or child among such diverse peoples as the Ancient Romans, the Eastern Highlanders of New Guinea, and the Tikopia of Polynesia (VAN HOOF, 1990, pp. 103-104; BRENDT, 1962 p. 183; FIRTH, 1967). The time immediately following an intimate's demise is particularly dangerous. In one case among the Tikopia, for example, a man "wailed and wailed" before hanging himself on the very day of his wife's death (FIRTH, 1967, p. 126). When a death occurs among the Aguaruna Jivaro of Peru, "people keep close watch on distraught relatives to make sure that no poisons are within their reach and that they are not left alone long enough to hang themselves" (BROWN, 1986, p. 315). But such precautions are not foolproof: During the funeral of one Aguaruna woman

> her daughter (by a previous marriage) escaped notice long enough to drink of mixture of water and laundry detergent. At about the same time in another part of the community, the deceased woman's brother, a man in his early twenties, was also overcome with grief and drank a bottle of insecticide. The next day, both died (BROWN, 1986, p. 315).

And when one Netsilik Eskimo woman heard that her son had been killed during a hunt, she "immediately took a thong (…) and a few moments later hanged herself from a high rock" (BALIKCI, 1970, p. 165).

Some who kill themselves after another's death speak only of escaping their grief, much like those who kill themselves to escape physical pain. Others speak of joining the deceased in the afterlife, as when one South African woman wrote – shortly before asphyxiating herself and her children – that her late husband was "coming to fetch us in a few days' time, you see, he loved us very much and could also not live without us in heaven" (quoted in GRASER, 1992, pp. 58-59). Still other cases have a ritualistic aspect, with self-killing being a socially approved way of honoring the dead (see gene-

rally FISCH, 2006). Perhaps the most famous example comes from traditional India, where widows were often encouraged to mount their husbands' funeral pyres in a form of suicide known as *sati* (THAKUR, 1963, pp. 126-127)[8]. The death of a polygynous king might result in the mass burning of multiple queens and concubines (THAKUR, 1963, p. 160). Similarly, in feudal Japan, warrior retainers might disembowel themselves upon the death of their lord (SEWARD, 1968, p.33).

An impending death can also cause suicide. For instance, the diagnosis of a terminal illness is a common reason for suicide pacts between spouses (BROWN and BARRACLOUGH, 1999). Because the loss of a closer partner is a greater loss of intimacy, suicide pacts are more likely to arise in relationships that are "exceptionally close and devoted" and in those between parties with no other close ties (BROWN and BARRACLOUGH, 1999, p. 1.303). In England and Wales, for example, "the close relationship [*between suicidal partners*] is usually exclusive with either no living family or an absence of family or community bonds" (BROWN and BARRACLOUGH, 1999, p. 1.305).

A note on overintimacy

The opposite of underintimacy is overintimacy – an increase of relational closeness (BLACK, 2011, Ch. 2). While the loss of intimacy more commonly results in suicide, the imposition of intimacy sometimes has the same effect. For instance, in societies with arranged marriages where women and girls can be forced to marry against their will, some might turn to suicide to escape the match. Thus in Highland New Guinea "girls sometimes threaten to commit suicide in order to persuade their parents and brothers to allow them to marry a man of their choice, or to avoid marrying a man chosen for them" (HEALEY, 1979, p. 95). Rape, another form of forced intimacy, might also cause suicide. The threat of rape may even lead to pre-emptive suicide, as when a 14-year-old Greek bride "killed herself (…) to escape being raped by Gothic invaders" (VAN HOOF, 1990, p. 24). The possibility of rape might also contribute to the mass suicides that sometimes followed ancient battles (e.g., THAKUR, 1963, pp. 166-168).

8 Widows who did not voluntarily commit sati may have often been forcibly killed. Upon the death of a raja, slave-girls may also have been forcibly burned on his funeral pyre (THAKUR, 1963, p.158).

But aside from these extremes, overintimacy rarely leads to suicide: The published literature abounds with cases caused by broken relationships, but describes few caused by new relationships. Overintimacy mainly causes suicide when it involves force – and therefore domination –, which adds overstratification to overintimacy.

Multidimensional movements

Multiple dimensions of social space often fluctuate at the same time. For instance, vertical mobility might have relational repercussions, creating, strengthening, weakening, or breaking social ties. Black suggests that such multidimensional movements have an additive or perhaps multiplicative effect, increasing the risk of conflict "like one explosive substance added to another" (2011, p. 8). For example, Black describes the case of one man who committed suicide after first killing his ex-wife and eight of her relatives:

> [*The killings*] occurred six days after his wife finalized a divorce, which ended not only his relationship with his wife but with his stepdaughter and others in his wife's family. His wife also obtained a court order requiring him to support her in the future, to make lump sum payments of US$ 10 thousand to her, to allow her to keep the diamond wedding ring he had bought for her, and even to give her the family dog (his last remaining close companion). He had recently lost his job as well, making it difficult for him to meet expenses such as the support payments to his ex-wife, his legal fees, and his house payments (BLACK, 2011, p. 8).

Similar – if less severe – cases are common. For example, one anthropologist writes of an East African victim who "could see his whole world collapsing around him" when he was simultaneously subjected to marital infidelity, public humiliation, legal prosecution, and job loss (WILSON, 1960, p. 197). Self-killings in Chicago are likely to follow disruptions in multiple relationships as well as the loss of various kinds of social status (MARIS, 1981, Ch.4). And suicide cases in South Metro also frequently involve multiple losses and disruptions, as in the case of a female victim who had recently been fired, had run out of money, and had also broken up with her girlfriend.

While it may appear obvious that the probability of suicide increases with the number of "problems" or "stressors," the theory of social time provides an elegant way of classifying and quantifying these problems as sociological events, and of predicting exactly which sociological events are most likely to trigger suicidal behavior[9].

Cumulative movements

Some movements of social time are both large and rapid, as when a billionaire loses his or her fortune overnight. But changes may also occur slowly and gradually, as when a fortune is steadily depleted over the course of several years. While the theory of moral time predicts that rapid changes are more likely to cause conflict, Black also proposes that smaller, incremental changes can have a cumulative effect: "Just as each puff of a cigarette does not result in lung cancer, so each movement of social time does not result in a conflict. And just as the likelihood of cancer increases if smoking continues, so the likelihood of conflict increases with each movement of social time" (BLACK, 2011, pp. 5-6). The same is true of suicide: While rapid and drastic fluctuations are most dangerous, a series of smaller fluctuations can steadily increase the odds of self-destruction as well. Hence one investigator of suicide in early 20th century Seattle makes a distinction between "immediate crises" – such as a particular event that triggers suicide – and "cumulative crises" that cause suicide though "an accumulation of difficulties over a relatively long period of time" (SCHMID, 1928, p. 70). Many self-killers have a long history of vertical and relational losses stemming from injury, illness, addiction, and interpersonal conflicts – a pattern of gradual erosion that suicide scholar Ronald Maris refers to as a "suicidal career" (MARIS, 1981, Ch.4; CURRAN, 1987, p. 60). Even if a particular loss of intimacy or status is bearable, a persistent pattern of such movements may become intolerable. In this manner, the progressive movement of social time generates a kind of potential energy that might eventually result in an explosive discharge of violence[10].

9 Rather than simply recording stressful life events, future researchers should construct scales and indexes to measure the overall degree and rate of underintimacy and overstratification present in the lives of subjects. If the theory outlined above is correct, suicidal individuals should score substantially higher on such measures than any comparable sample of non-suicidal persons.

Social time and social structure

The preceding pages address the social dynamics of suicide – the fluctuations of social space that cause suicide to occur. These fluctuations – or movements of social time – are not the only causes of suicide, but they are by far the most common sociological events that lead to self-destruction. Following Black's theory of moral time, we can predict that suicide is caused by overinferiority and underintimacy, that the probability of these events producing suicide is a direct function of both their magnitude and speed, and that the probability is greater when both movements occur at once than when they occur separately.

Movements of social time cause suicide – but not all movements do so. The effects of social time vary with the nature of the movement. For instance, Campbell (2013) argues that the fundamental cause of genocide is the increase of cultural diversity – a kind of social time virtually never associated suicide. And while suicide is often caused by increases in stratification, as when one person falls below former equals, genocide is often caused by decreasing stratification, as when a structurally inferior ethnic group rises in status, reducing the superiority of the dominant ethnic group (CAMPBELL, 2013, p. 469). Yet even the movements that commonly cause suicide can also cause something else entirely. Underintimacy, for instance, sometimes causes homicide instead of suicide, as when a man kills his estranged partner but not himself. In other cases, underintimacy might cause someone to seek support from friends or perhaps even a professional therapist. Likewise, overinferiority – such as the loss of a job – can lead to a variety of outcomes other than suicide, including interpersonal violence, political protest, or litigation. We can explain some of this variation with the quantity of social time: The most severe reactions, such as acts of lethal violence, tend to follow the largest movements of social time. But why might similar quantities of social time produce different effects? The answer lies in the structure of social space.

The effects of social time depend not only on the nature and magnitude of the movement, but on the social structure in which it occurs. For example, the probability that a given movement of social time will lead to suicide partly depends on the location of the movement in relational space. More preci-

10 Large movements of social time – such as the complete financial ruin of a formerly wealthy person – are more likely to be a sufficient cause of suicide, and thus more likely to cause suicide even in the absence of a history of similar movements. One testable implication is that those who kill themselves over minor degrees of overinferiority or underintimacy are more likely to have an extensive history of such movements than are those who kill themselves immediately after a major loss.

sely, it depends on social integration – the position of a person or group in a network of social ties. Durkheim's theory of egoistic suicide predicts that suicide varies inversely with social integration (DURKHEIM, 1951[1857], pp. 217-240)[11]. According to the theory, those with fewer and weaker connections are more likely to commit suicide – and much research supports this idea (e.g., DANIGELIS and POPE, 1979; MARIS, 1981, pp. 111-115). Thus we can predict that a given degree of overinferiority or underintimacy is more likely to cause suicide among those with less integration. But the converse is also true: Holding integration constant, the likelihood of suicide varies directly with the degree of overinferiority and underintimacy[12].

Likewise, both social time and social space are necessary to explain particular patterns of suicide, such as suicide to protest or punish deviant conduct. My (2012) theory of moralistic suicide uses social structure to predict when a conflict will lead to self-destruction. For example, suicide is more likely to express grievances against a social superior than against a social inferior. While a given reduction of intimacy might provoke a grievance, it is less likely to result in suicide if that grievance is directed at a social inferior. For instance, an abandoned husband is less likely to commit suicide in a patriarchal society than in a society where marriages are egalitarian. Patriarchs might express their grievances by harming or killing their wives, but rarely express grievances by harming or killing themselves (e.g., COUNTS, 1980; 1987). Moralistic suicide also varies inversely with relational distance. This applies, for example, to grievances stemming from overinferiority: A theft, insult, or injury at the hands of an intimate is more likely to cause suicide than a similar loss at the hands of a stranger (e.g., MANNING, forthcoming). Holding constant social time, the likelihood of suicide varies with the structure of the conflict. But note that not every grievance against a close superior leads to suicide. Many grievances are simply tolerated – and the same structural features that encourage moralistic suicide also encourage toleration (BLACK, 1998, Ch.5). The likelihood of toleration varies inversely with the severity of the grievance, which in turn is a direct function of social time[13]. Holding constant social structure, the likelihood of moralistic suicide varies directly with social time[14]. For instance, a spouse spending too much time at work and a spouse ending the relationship might both cause conflict, but the latter conflict is more likely to result in suicide.

11 Though there is debate over the precise meaning of "integration" in Durkheim's original work, most subsequent research defines integration as the number and closeness of an individual's social ties (HASSAN, 1995, p.5). Similarly, Black conceptualizes integration as a "location in radial space" measurable by the quantity of social ties and involvements (BLACK, 1976, p.48).

12 The theory of egoistic suicide says nothing about what events might trigger suicide. But, as noted earlier, Durkheim's ([1897]1951, pp.249-252) theory of anomic suicide does address events such as sudden changes in status. Insofar as the theory predicts that both upward and downward mobility cause suicide, it is only partially correct.

Conclusion

The social world is in a constant state of flux. Every interaction pulls people closer together or pushes them farther apart, raises their status or lowers it. Most movements are small – minor achievements, small expenses, fleeting criticisms. Others are large – broken relationships, lost fortunes, and tarnished reputations. All have their origins in previous movements, and all cause subsequent movements. Each action provokes a reaction. But which reaction will occur?

The probability that a movement of social time will result in suicide, homicide, or any other human behavior depends partly on factors such as the social status and relational closeness of those involved. A State that increases its domination of citizens provokes protest suicides, while a State that increases its domination of foreigners provokes terrorist attacks. A patriarch whose wife flees home might beat or kill her, while an abandoned husband in an egalitarian relationship might kill himself. Each action or reaction itself modifies social space, affecting the course of subsequent behaviors. Social time and social space engage in a complex dance, each affecting the other, always moving, never static.

But the dance itself gives rise to a new variable: like the physical quantities of velocity and acceleration, the size, speed, and direction of social change exerts its own influence upon the course of social life. Unlike many physical quantities, its influence is poorly understood. In the previous pages I have advanced several propositions regarding social time, social structure, and suicide. I have presented a wide variety of evidence to illustrate these propositions, and encourage empirical specialists in the study of suicide to conduct the detailed and systematic studies necessary for refining and revising this and other general theories of suicide. But the theory outlined above is not only relevant to specialists in the study of suicide. The same conceptual and explanatory strategy can be applied to all kinds of behavior, including all manner of deviance, violence, and social control. Which movements of social time cause theft? Which cause homicide? Which provoke condemnation and which provoke praise? Sociologists have much to learn about the effects of social time.

13 The severity of a grievance depends, in part, on the social structure in which a movement of social time occurs. For instance, a given decrease in intimacy will cause more severe conflict in an intimate relationship than in a relationship that is more distant (BLACK, 2011, Ch.8).

14 Again, this also includes the cumulative effects of social time. For example, suicides on the Micronesian island of Truk often react to what outsiders might view as minor issues, but locals "assert that behind most of these single trivial incidents that immediately preceded suicides lies a tale of long-standing family tensions and conflicts" (HEZEL, 1984, p.197).

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RESUMEN: La mayoría de las teorías sociológicas explican el suicidio con condiciones macrosociales estáticas, como el grado de integración social o de desigualdad, por lo que no se identifican las causas dinámicas de suicidios individuales. Para corregir esta deficiencia, el articulo **El suicidio y el tiempo social** utilizació la teoría del conflicto de Donald Black, que explica los enfrentamientos entre lo bueno y lo malo como movimientos de tiempo social - fluctuaciones dinámicas del espacio social, incluidos los cambios de nivel de relación de intimidad y de desigualdad. Propongo que el suicidio ocurre por un aumento de la desigualdad y la disminución en la intimidad, y la probabilidad de suicidio varía directamente con la dimensión y la velocidad de estos cambios.
Palabras clave: suicidio, teoria, desvio, violencia, sociologia pura

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